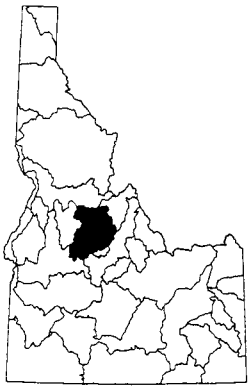
Salmon River Drainage
Middle Fork



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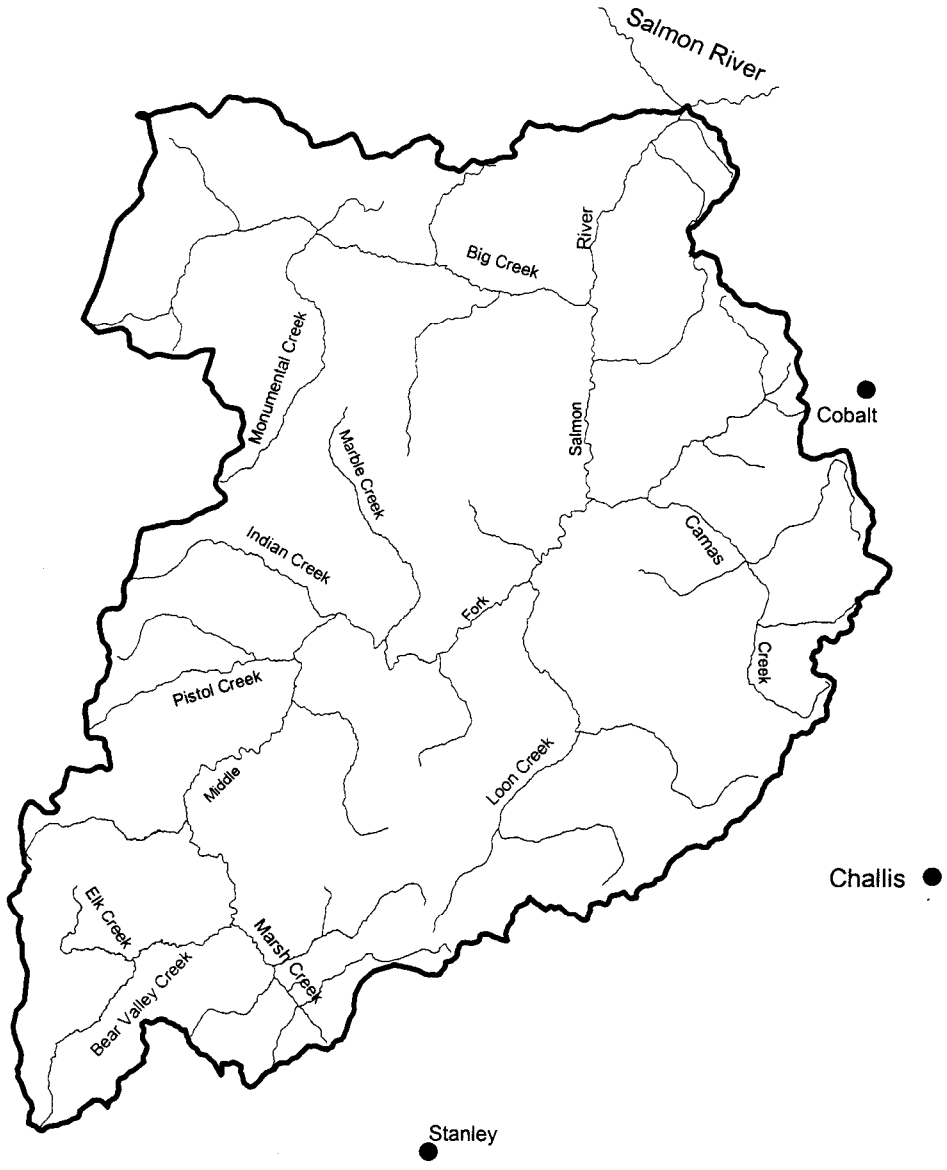

11. MIDDLE FORK SALMON RIVER DRAINAGE

A. Overview

The Middle Fork Salmon River drains 2,830 square miles of central Idaho. The main river is classified as wild as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and most of the drainage is within the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area. Prior to classification as wilderness, the Middle Fork Salmon River drainage was included in the Idaho Primitive Area.

The topography in the Middle Fork Salmon River drainage is extremely rugged and remote. Road access is limited to a single point on the main river at Dagger Falls and secondary roads to the upper ends of a few tributary streams. The principal means of access are aircraft, boat, and trail.

Except for some alpine lakes and a few small streams, the Middle Fork drainage contains only native species and fish stocks that have evolved there. Historically, a significant portion of the chinook salmon and steelhead trout in the Salmon River drainage spawned and reared in the Middle Fork Salmon River and tributaries.

Anadromous species include wild, indigenous spring and summer chinook salmon and summer steelhead. The Middle Fork Salmon River is one of only four drainages in the Columbia Basin that supports a population of wild steelhead classified as B-run because they are predominantly large fish which spend two or three years in the ocean. Both the chinook and steelhead of the Middle Fork Salmon River are adapted to the long migration distances necessary for their perpetuation. Preservation of the indigenous gene pools is the highest priority, as is rebuilding these runs. The key component to meeting this objective is improved Columbia and Snake River migration survival since habitat, hatcheries, and harvest are not an issue in this drainage.

Although the Middle Fork Salmon River supported a major chinook fishery, with annual harvest exceeding 2,000 fish in the late 1960s, nontreaty harvest has not been allowed for salmon and steelhead since 1978 because of very low run sizes. Middle Fork Salmon River steelhead are caught incidentally during fisheries in the mainstem Salmon River which target hatchery steelhead where they provide an exceptional catch-and-release opportunity for trophy class wild steelhead. Although harvest opportunity is not expected for salmon or steelhead in the Middle Fork Salmon River in the next five years, the long-term goal is to provide low yield, quality fisheries on these native species. This goal is achievable only if improved juvenile migration survival through the Snake and Columbia hydroelectric system is attained.

Native, resident game species include bull, rainbow trout and cutthroat trout, and mountain whitefish. The Middle Fork Salmon River cutthroat trout population has been identified as a pure westslope strain.

There are no major dams in the Middle Fork drainage, and most of the streams are in pristine condition. Some tributary streams have been, and are being, altered by mining activity. Major mining sites and their access roads were not included in the

wilderness area. Other tributaries have been historically impacted by grazing allotments, but most watersheds are now improving under more controlled management.

B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Preserve genetic integrity of wild native salmon, steelhead, and trout.

   Program: Manage hatchery supplemented Salmon River anadromous stocks to minimize straying into the Middle Fork Salmon River.

   Program: Designated wild anadromous fish sanctuary. No stocking of hatchery fish into the stream environment.

   Program: Continue to work with other state and federal agencies to improve juvenile downstream and adult upstream passage to and from the Middle Fork Salmon River.

2. Objective: Manage resident fisheries for low angler density fishing experiences and high catch rates and fish size.

   Program: Maintain catch-and-release regulations for native trout in the mainstem Middle Fork Salmon River and its tributaries.

   Program: Maintain cutthroat trout harvest restrictions in the main Salmon River to protect Middle Fork Salmon River cutthroat trout that emigrate there to overwinter.

3. Objective: Maintain and improve habitat and water quality of key tributary fish production areas.

   Program: Work with Forest Service and permittees to establish healthy riparian vegetation.

   Program: Work with the Forest Service to establish stream substrate objectives for sediment that would maintain high productivity of aquatic habitat.

   Program: Screen all identified irrigation diversions where needed.

   Program: Participate in interagency mining oversight committees to review operating plans and work with regulatory agencies to require strict compliance with mining laws to protect water quality and fish populations. Develop monitoring programs for fish populations and fish habitat relative to mining activities, if needed.

   Program: Participate in grazing allotment management plan reviews. Eliminate negative grazing impacts to fishery productivity and survival.

4. Objective: Maximize recruitment of native trout to the main river from tributaries.

   Program: Continue restrictive regulations in tributaries. Continue monitoring juvenile densities by snorkeling once every three years.

5. Objective: Re-establish anadromous runs to the numbers necessary to fully utilize available spawning and rearing habitat.

   Program: Continue to work with other state and federal agencies to improve juvenile downstream and adult upstream passage to and from the Middle Fork Salmon River.

6. Objective: Develop methodologies for making accurate estimates of anadromous spawning escapement to the Middle Fork Salmon River.

   Program: Work with other agencies to initiate research aimed at making chinook and steelhead escapement estimates to the Middle Fork Salmon River. Continue parr density monitoring once every three years and redd counts annually.

7. Objective: Increase ability of anglers to properly identify fish species.

   Program: Provide fish identification signs and posters to increase recognition of bull trout. Encourage harvest of brook trout.

DRAINAGE: Middle Fork Salmon River					
Water	Miles/acre	Fishery			Management Direction
		Type	Species Present	Management	
From mouth to Roaring Creek	4/	Coldwater Anadromous	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Bull trout Steelhead Chinook salmon Whitefish	Quality Conservation	Wild stocks catch-and-release fishery. Closed to harvest. Closed to Adult harvest. Wild production genetic refuge. Maximize yield during period open for other species.
From Roaring Creek to Dagger Falls including tributaries except tributaries of Camas and Loon Creeks.	93/	Coldwater Anadromous	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Bull trout Chinook salmon Steelhead Whitefish Brook trout	Quality Conservation	Wild stocks catch-and-release fishery. Closed to harvest. Closed to Adult harvest. Wild production genetic refuge. Maximize yield during period open for other species.
Dagger Falls	1/	Coldwater Anadromous	Cutthroat trout Bull trout Chinook salmon Steelhead Rainbow trout Whitefish	Conservation	Maintain closure on fish concentrated below falls.
From Dagger Falls to headwaters including tributaries.	36/	Coldwater Anadromous	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Bull trout Steelhead Chinook salmon Whitefish Brook trout	Quality Conservation Wild trout	Wild stock catch-and-release fishery. Closed to harvest. Closed to Adult harvest. Wild production genetic refuge. Maximize yield during period open for other species.

Camas Creek	24/	Coldwater Anadromous	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Whitefish Brook trout Chinook salmon Steelhead Bull trout	Wild/Quality Wild trout Conservation	Wild stock catch-and-release in mainstem and 2 fish harvest rules in tributaries. Maximize yield during period open for other species. Closed to harvest of adult chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout to protect wild stocks.
Loon Creek	25/	Coldwater Anadromous	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Whitefish Bull trout Chinook salmon Steelhead	Wild/Quality Wild trout Conservation	Wild stock catch-and-release in mainstem trout and 2 fish harvest rules in tributaries. Maximize yield during period open for other species. Closed to harvest of adult chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout to protect wild stocks.
Josephus Lake	/7	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout	General	Stock with catchable rainbow trout- sterile if possible.
Yellowjacket Lake	/5	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	General	Stock with catchable rainbow trout - sterile if possible.
Capehorn Lakes	/44	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout	General	Capehorn #2 (middle lake) stocked with catchable rainbow trout to provide fishery for scout camp. Large (upper) lake provides a brook trout fishery.
Alpine Lakes	/2,000	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Golden trout Brook trout Grayling Bull trout	General Conservation	Provide diversity of angling opportunity while maintaining natural wilderness values. Leave some lakes fishless to provide for native fauna. Closed to harvest.